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ABSTRACT

A review of literature dealing with educational accountability and a discussion of the history of the movement, this paper suggests that the National Assessment of Educational Progress was partly a result of the public's growing concern about the quality of education and the increase in local, state, and federal taxes needed to support education. The National Assessment gave rise to the development of statewide testing programs. Currently, there are bills under consideration in most state legislatures for "systems approaches" to accountability; as a result, teachers throughout the country are being asked by their state departments of education, by regional accrediting associations, and by school districts to develop a performance-based curriculum in English. It is suggested that a problem exists in this type of curriculum in that it is geared not to meet the needs of the individual student, or even of groups of students, but rather to obtain consistency in state and nationwide educational achievement as evidenced by testing. It is further suggested that English teachers are becoming more aware of the significance of testing and measurement in the English curriculum, and that through this awareness, a new potential of the National Assessment may be realized. (LL)

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"National Assessment: Backgrounds and Projections - 1975"

by

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress in a way represents the top of an iceberg. The iceberg has lain below the surface of American education for many years. Of what nature is the iceberg and what is its significance for English? It is a very large and complex iceberg and its generic name is "accountability." In education, during the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's and 1970's -- partly as a result of the effects of Sputnik in 1957, concepts involving the application of engineering research and development (including human factors engineering), behavioristic psychology, communication theory, cybernetics and psychometrics and branches of economics and logistics especially related to the effective utilization of instructional personnel, buildings (learning spaces), computers, together with advanced budgeting and accounting systems began to be proposed as applicable to education as a "systems approach." Such an approach was harmonious with the new need for "accountability" since it allowed for the evaluation of the various components within the system in terms of overall objectives.[1] As we now know the term "objectives," specifically terminal behavioral objectives, has become a key word in various "accountability" movements.

Assessment, including all forms of external measurement and testing in any form are a part of this accountability iceberg -- indeed an essential part as I will demonstrate. Saettler, in his History of Instructional Technology describes completely the combination of forces forming the iceberg in the history of educational technology in this century. Of special interest in his book is a fairly extensive case study of the development of instructional technology in the military service and in industry during World War II. This is a significant and important development since it represented a first attempt to place a maximum

effort (in the form of substantial sums of money) behind the use of various instructional media in carefully organized programs.[2] It clearly documents the fact that "systems approach" sprang first from a military-industrial model and that what we are now seeing in the rapid development of national and state-wide testing and assessment programs is an attempt by elements of the educational testing and measurement community and various large and powerful corporations to impose this model on American schooling through the establishment of the concept of the "systems approach" to "accountability" within the United States Office of Education and the various state departments of education acting through the Education Commission of the States of which the National Assessment of Educational Progress is a part.[3]

Callahan has shown that many American educators, particularly school administrators, were very much ready for the application of this newly refined "systems approach" to education. In his book, Education and the Cult of Efficiency, he proposes that the impact of American business values and practices has long been pervasive in American education during the twentieth century. The following quotation from the preface of his book reveals his point of view and also what he believes to be his major conclusion:

> When I began this study some five years ago, my intent was to explore the origin and development of the adoption of business values and practices in educational administration. My investigation revealed that this adoption had started about 1900 and had reached a point by 1930, that, among other things, school administrators perceived themselves as business managers, or, as they would say, "school executives" rather than as scholars and educational philosophers. The question which now became significant was why had school administrators adopted business values and practices and assumed the posture of the business executive? Education is not a business. The school is not a factory. Of course, by 1910 the scale of operations in both business and education (in the large cities) had produced large organizations, and so it was reasonable and even legitimate to expect the borrowing of ideas and techniques from one set of institutions to another. But the evidence indicated that the extent of the borrowing had been too great for such an explanation to be adequate.
>
> I had felt that the adoption of business values and practices might be explained simply by the process of cultural diffusion in which the flow of ideas and values is generally from high status or power groups

in a culture to those with less status and power. By 1905, as James Bryce pointed out, business was king in American society, and certainly between 1910 and 1929 (if not down to the present time) the business and industrial group has had top status and power in America. On the other hand, it does not take profound knowledge of American education to know that educators are, and have been, a relatively low-status, low-power group. So I was not really surprised to find business ideas and practices being used in education.

What was unexpected was the extent, not only of the power of the business - industrial groups, but of the strength of the business ideology in the American culture on the one hand and the extreme weakness and vulnerability of schoolmen, especially school administrators, on the other. I had expected more professional autonomy and I was completely unprepared for the extent and degree of capitulation by administrators to whatever demands were made upon them. I was surprised and then dismayed to learn how many decisions they made or were forced to make, not on educational grounds, but as a means of appeasing their critics in order to maintain their positions in the school.

I am now convinced that much of what has happened in American education since 1900 can be explained on the basis of the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and that this vulnerability is built into our pattern of local support and control. This has been true in the past and, unless changes are made, will continue to be true in the future. Thus it was predictable in 1957 that school administrators would respond quickly to the criticism which followed the launching of the first Russian satellite and would begin to place great emphasis upon science and mathematics. It was also predictable that they would welcome and quickly adopt James B. Conant's recommendations for change in the high schools, for, with his great stature in the country, his suggestions were made to order for defense. Any superintendent who could say that he was adopting Conant's recommendations, or better yet, that his school system had already been following them for years, was almost impregnable.

The point is not whether more or less science and mathematics should be taught in the schools, or whether Conant's suggestions would improve the schools; the point is that when the schools are being criticized, vulnerable school administrators have to respond. The quickness of the response and the nature of the response depend upon the nature and strength of the criticism. Since 1900 this pattern of criticism and response has produced some desirable and some undesirable educational changes, but the real point is that this is an inadequate and inappropriate basis for establishing sound educational policy. It is as far as one can imagine from anything that might be called educational statesmanship. Evidence presented in this study shows that such a method of operation does not necessarily result in "meeting the needs of the community" and it often results in an abdication of responsibility for educational leadership.[4]

Callahan's study with emphasis on the early introduction of techniques from the American business community and the military industrial complex into American education explains in considerable measure how it was possible that the pressures for educational reform following Sputnik in 1957 led to large expenditures of federal money in the 1960's under the National Defense Education Act, as well as other forms of federal aid. During the period between 1962 and 1966, approximately $7,700,000 was spent on English curriculum and demonstration centers alone with much more spent on institutes for the in-service training of English teachers.

As has been previously noted, in 1961 the National Council of Teachers of English published the results of the national survey of the state of English teaching in the nation. More than any other single piece of research or scholarship on the teaching of English, this survey, The National Interest and the Teaching of English, (a copy of which was sent to every Congressman and Senator) influenced the Congress...to pour massive support into research and development in the teaching of English from 1961 on.[5] That report solidly linked English with the national defense effort and made possible the varieties of federal support which took place in the English Curriculum Development Centers, National Defense Education Act Institutes for teachers and a variety of other federal efforts mostly throughout the 1960's.

Vast sums of federal money were being spent and it was only a matter of time until questions began to be raised within the Congress and within state legislatures concerning the value received for these sums of money which were being expended. That this questioning of educators about the expenditure of monies began to achieve a form of a megalomania is the hypothesis of anthropologist Jules Henry who proposes that a "pattern of public anxiety about education" developed during the 1960's and can be clearly documented. He proposes that this pattern is a

"symptom of a vast anxiety that has seized education in this country; an anxiety so immense as to make one wonder whether it isn't a sickness."[6] Henry documents a variety of sources to substantiate this hypothesis. With respect to English he comments as follows:

> Beginning March 13, 1960 (June 21, 1960; Jan. 8, 1962; November 27, 1963; December 30, 1963) a series of articles appeared in the Times examining the teaching of English. The National Education Association discovered in March, 1960 that gifted students were behind in English although they might be getting A's in everything else. Meanwhile a New York City study revealed that 10% of the applicants for teaching jobs had not mastered the ability to meet a 'minimum standard of acceptability' in writing correct English. In February 1962 the National Council of Teachers of English reported that 'seventy percent of colleges and universities had to provide remedial work in English and that 150,000 students failed college entrance tests in English in 1960'...In 1963 Francis Keppel (then United States Commissioner of Education) was warned that 'the teaching of English is so poor it has reached a desperate point that threatens the nation's educational system.' At that time a new 'study showed that many high school teachers rated themselves as unqualified' to teach English.[7]

Jules Henry's article documents the public's growing concern over educational achievement in the United States during the early 1960's. It is now clear that those who developed the National Assessment Program capitalized on the public's growing concern about the quality of education and the growing local, state and federal taxes needed to support education. One of their own publications shows how much they did capitalize on this anxiety and how carefully they identified themselves with the early stages of the "accountability" movement:

> Despite the fact that public concern about the adequacy of education in the United States is at a recognized high, we are unable to obtain the facts necessary to take intelligent action. We do not really know what our children are learning...The increases in the numbers of young people staying in school and preparing for higher education have pushed the cost of public education beyond the means of local communities and necessitated vast state and federal expenditures. Although millions of parents and millions of taxpayers have a stake in the nation's educational system, they have no means to evaluate its effectiveness in terms of desirable goals and no way of knowing whether, over the years, the quality is improving or falling behind.[8]

Although the initial funds for financing the national assessment were made possibly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, it was clear from the beginning

that the impetus for the formation of the Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education came from the highest levels in government and that moral support was given by John Gardner, then Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and by Francis Keppel, former dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard and United States Commissioner of Education in the early 1960's, and later by Harold Howe II who followed Keppel in this position. A search of the records establishing the United States Office of Education soon showed these leaders that a rationale could be found for involving massive support by the federal government for national assessment.

> The Committee found that it was breaking new ground, although assessing educational progress was not a new concern. As far back as the establishment of the U.S. Office of Education in 1867, one of the duties of the Commissioner fixed by the charter was to determine the progress of education in the several states. The information available at present, however, primarily measures input rather than output; it records the dollars spent, the buildings occupied, the number and educational accomplishments of the teachers; it does not reveal how much has been learned and it does not record progress. [9]

Massive federal support for national assessment was not long in coming. Supported by such powerful forces in education and government it had been clear from the first indication that there was to be a national assessment. The development of national assessment parallels in time Jules Henry's report of the pattern of mounting public anxiety over federal, state and local expenditures and the application of the "systems approaches" to educational management and administration at all levels. Its first director was Ralph Tyler, then Director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He served as the first chairman of the Exploratory Committee on Assessing the Progress of Education (the precursor of the National Assessment of Educational Progress). The project itself began in the early 1960's. Tyler writes of those early days as follows:

> In the summer of 1963, several educational leaders asked me to prepare a memorandum on the possibility of assessing the progress of education. This memorandum was the subject of a discussion in December 1963, by a

> conference of educational measurement people who concluded that the development of such an assessment was feasible at this time. In January, 1964, a conference of national educational leaders reviewed the memorandum and discussed the educational pros and cons of developing an assessment procedure. The conclusion of the conference was that such an appraisal involved problems of potential misuse but that the need for carefully developed instruments and comprehensive information was so great that a project of this sort should be launched.[10]

The "educational measurement people" mentioned by Dr. Tyler had always been important members of the American educational community. Dr. Tyler himself had been a member of this measurement community since the 1930's when he had been involved in the preparation and evaluation of the famous Eight-Year Study in the field of education. Later in 1950 as a Professor at the University of Chicago, Dr. Tyler prepared a syllabus for a University of Chicago course in "Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction." The purpose was to "help the student of education to understand more fully the kinds of problems involved in developing a curriculum and plan of instruction and to acquire some techniques by which these basic problems may be attacked."[11]

As Joseph Kirschner has noted, the "Tyler rationale" for developing any curriculum and plan of instruction turned on four questions:

1. What educational purposes should the schools seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

> While question 3 is the more obviously technological one, the others are also concerned with techniques of choosing what it is that is to be taught and how it is to be taught. Tyler's concern was with providing a more adequate basis for selecting objectives and for converting these objectives into behavioral terms so they could be taught to the student in such a way that the outcomes, or effectiveness of teaching, could be determined. One finds these objectives he proposed by considering student needs and interests, societal needs, and the concerns of subject matter specialists. Philosophy and psychology are used as screens to clarify the list of objectives and put them in a form appropriate for the learners involved. One winds up with a list of precisely stated objectives accompanied by appropriate activities for their realization.[12]

To the many students of Tyler taking Education 360 at the University of Chicago who went on to become superintendents, state superintendents of instruction, curriculum directors and supervisors, the "Tyler rationale" was not only familiar, but also became famous. To them, as they confronted the problem of "accountability," "systems approaches" involving behavioral-based objectives, and national, state-wide and local assessments became logical solutions. Tyler's idea that learning objectives for students should be written in precise behavioral terms made "accountability" in those terms eminently feasible. In fact, so neat a fit was the "Tyler rationale" into the "systems approach" philosophy that Callahan would easily have identified it as part of his "cult of efficiency." But Tyler apparently never saw national assessment as a part of this larger picture nor does he yet. His earlier statements seem to show that he saw no threat in any form of external testing nor did he connect it with a national trend toward "accountability" in education, the "systems approach," and certainly not with the profit motive of the American business community or those status motives of the educational testing and measurement community:

> Fortunately, since the Eight-Year Study, and perhaps as a result of it, the major external testing programs for college admission and for scholarship purposes do not include tests which emphasize specific objectives widely different from the objectives approved by the leaders of secondary education. The student performance measured in these tests largely includes vocabulary, reading interpretation, and analysis of situations, and problems presented in the tests and mathematical exercises. There is no longer an emphasis upon the recall of specific items of information characteristic of the college entrance tests and Regents examinations of thirty years ago. Hence, if the school staff members were very familiar with the major external tests, they would not find it necessary to deflect their teaching in undesirable directions in order to teach what the tests measured.[13]

It is apparent in this statement that Tyler sees no problem with measuring performance as long as the "objectives" of those doing the measuring are not "widely different" from the objectives of the "leaders of secondary education." What he thinks will happen as a result of long range large scale external testing is not clear.

Whether his above conclusions will hold true for national assessment or for developing state-wide testing examinations in writing, reading, mathematics and other areas remains to be seen, but personally, I have my doubts. It seems clear at this point in time that the state testing programs in reading and English are growing and that the results of national assessment insofar as English is concerned so far are simply adding fuel to the "accountability" fire. Also, state-wide tests are growing and state departments of education and state legislatures as well as local districts are turning to systems approaches to establish accountability.

There are statewide testing programs in reading and writing in many states and more coming. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has become an in-service agency for state department personnel.[14] There are bills in most state legislatures for "systems approaches" to accountability and as a result teachers throughout the country are being asked by their state departments of education, by regional accrediting associations, and by their own school districts to develop a performance-based curriculum in English. Many teachers of English have recently come to know the problems inherent in this scheme from first-hand experience and the National Council of Teachers of English continues to make extensive efforts to study the effects of the applications of these "systems approaches" to the teaching of English.

We have had some forecasts of the effects of national and state-wide testing programs. In 1965, two years after the beginning of national assessment, Harold Hand predicted that ultimately the Carnegie Foundation's assessment committee proposed:

> ...to create a national achievement testing program in which the elementary and secondary schools are to be judged on the basis of how the test scores made by their pupils compare with the test scores made by the youngsters in other schools.

> Such a national testing program would create enormous pressures on school boards, school administrators, and classroom teachers, but most of all on school children. In the public mind schools whose students make comparatively low test scores would be viewed as inferior schools, and schools whose students score high would be applauded as superior. Youngsters of high native endowment who have become adept in playing what a New Jersey school principal calls the classroom test passing game would, of course, make their teachers and their schools look good in the eyes of the public -- provided, that is, that the number of such youngsters enrolled is far greater than the number of children of low scholastic ability who are inept at the test passing game. What I am saying is that all such inept children would immediately become a threat to the security of their teachers, their principals, their superintendents, and of the members of their boards of education the moment a national achievement testing program is put into operation...No educator in his right mind will deny that whatever is tested for is what will be taught--and especially will this be the case if the test results are used for making comparisons among schools the nation over. As surely as night follows day, we shall have a national curriculum if we have a national achievement testing program in which comparisons among schools in the various geographic areas of the U.S. are made...The road which leads to a centrally controlled national curriculum is already more than partially paved--and seductively so by bricks of gold...[15]

Is Hand's prediction coming to pass in the development of National Assessment? Perhaps he would say that it is no accident that in 1969, National Assessment passed to the control of the Education Commission of the States. The Education Commission of the States is a non-profit organization with 43 member states, a membership of governors, chief state school officers, legislators and others concerned about education. ECS picked up the National Assessment contract June 2, 1969, with a budget of 2.5 million dollars. The 1970 budget was expected to reach 4 million dollars.[16] It seems clear that the placing of National Assessment within a large organization of states makes it possible to infuse state departments of education with the "systems approach" philosophy. Indeed, this has apparently already been done, paving the way for the variety of statewide testing programs which are now being proposed in various state departments of education.[17] What do we know about statewide testing programs in English?

We have precious little early research on the effects of statewide testing programs in English, but we do have one major research study which although it was done a number of years ago still stands out for the high quality of both its

methodology and in my view its conclusions. I speak, of course, of the study of the English Section of New York State Regents Inquiry, which was conducted by Professor Dora V. Smith of the University of Minnesota during the 1938-39 academic year. The results of the Inquiry were published as English Monograph No. 11 of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1941. Professor Smith's recommendations and conclusions regarding external examinations in English, which were made on the basis of her study of a state, which at that time was the only state requiring statewide external examinations, are still of considerable interest:

> Evidence gathered in the Inquiry indicates clearly that the Regents examinations worked against consideration of local or individual need in the schools of New York State. On the other hand, they do not accomplish that uniformity of achievement which they are intended to promote. For, according to figures presented in chapter 3 and 4, in spite of the arbitrary standard of passing set for the Regents examinations, widespread variation in attainment exists both within and among the schools of the state. Differences in ability, in background, and in opportunity for personal development may even be heightened rather than lessened by forcing everybody into a single mold. The effect of the examinations is to put all pupils through the same program whether it is adapted to their needs and their capacities or not. With the exception of a small minority of schools, local authorities are in many instances more concerned with their pupils making a creditable showing on the state examinations than they are with studying their own local needs and adapting instruction accordingly...Teachers in schools are in many instances judged on the percentage of their pupils making high or low scores on the examinations. The question arises as to whether a similar amount of money might be used to furnish needs and testing progress in this phase of English or that, now in one section of the state and now another, in assisting schools to develop techniques for determining success or failure in reading and expression which go far beyond those of the average group examination might not pay greater dividends over a period of years than the annual recording of scores now prominent throughout the state. Because of factors which might be intelligently determined by a wide variety of means, schools assume year by year relatively the same position in Regents examinations. What the local authorities need to know specifically is what are causes leading to success or failure on these examinations. If such a program had even half the influence upon local instruction in the form of imitative procedure, which the present formal system of examinations exerts, it might easily revolutionize instructional emphases in English in a comparatively short period of time.[18]

As the various results from the national assessments in reading, writing, and literature have become available to the profession, the implications have become subject to analysis and scrutiny. Slotnick and Rogers, for example, analyzed the writing errors in the "famous person" essay written by a national probability sample of seventeen year olds during the 1969-70 assessment of writing. They found in general that black respondents who had parents who had not graduated from high school made more errors and that their writing seemed to reflect more "linguistic interference" than respondents who were predominantly female and white. Also, they found that the children of parents who had finished high school made fewer errors and wrote longer and more specific essays. Slotnick and Rogers, in discussing their findings note that since they did not conduct an experimental study, they could not attribute any casuality to the above results but are merely reporting the characteristics of the respondents and their essays "without attempting to determine how those characteristics are related to the writing processes."[19]

In their "Roundtable Review" of the writing assessment, John C. Mellon and Sister Philippa Coogan criticized both the conduct of the assessment and the analysis of results. In this criticism they both clearly linked national assessment with the "accountability" movement. Henry B. Slotnick in his response, once again felt the necessity to attempt to disassociate national assessment from any "accountability" movements.[20] In view of the evidence cited earlier from the Newsletter of the National Assessment of Educational Progress it seems clear that not only is national assessment a part of the "accountability" movement -- it is an integral part whose side effects, stimulated by its parent body, the Education Commission of the States, are leading to the in-service training of hundreds of state department and local school personnel in "systems approaches" and assessment techniques. Undoubtedly these people will be able to initiate "systems approaches" within their own states and school districts as soon as the appropriate legislation is passed

by the state legislature. Private corporations are also in the act, continuing to contract with states and local districts to set up "systems approaches" and aid "accountability" movements in various forms. These "side effects" may be more important to the English teaching profession than the results of the various assessments themselves. Nevertheless, both the results and the processes of assessment need wide dissemination and discussion. The various techniques of assessment developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the implications of these results for curriculum development have previously been called for.[21] Such calls and such discussions as those in the "Roundtable Review" mentioned above have not gone unheeded. In the face of a cutback of funds to the national assessment program, the National Council of Teachers of English established a Committee on National Assessment and English in 1974 to review the results of the reading, writing, and literature assessments and to develop a document which would present the results of these three assessments in readable, understandable form and would be available to classroom teachers and curriculum specialists in local school districts. The Committee is at work and the first draft of the document is being circulated among its members with a hope for publication in the near future. Teachers continue to show a growing awareness of the significance of testing and measurement in teaching English. The current issue of the English Journal, for example, has as its focus, "Testing, Assessment, and Grading."[22] There is little in it to suggest that there has ever been a national assessment program dealing with literature, reading or writing and paid for by thousands of dollars of the taxpayers' money. Yet the concerns of English teachers in dealing with the effect of mass testing on curriculum development and the needs for new and innovative assessment techniques clearly run through many of the articles in the issue. Since 32 states now have some form of accountability legislation, it seems clear that assessment will be with us for some time.[23] The

increased interest of English teachers in all forms of assessment may well lead to a new look at the potential of The National Assessment of Educational Progress so that we may learn not only what it has become but shape what we want it to be.

FOOTNOTES

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21. Shafer, Robert E., "A National Assessment in English: A Double Edged Sword," Elementary English, April 1971, pp. 194-195.

22. English Journal, Vol. 64, No. 3, March 1975, passim.

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